

The Coronavirus Act received royal assent today, giving formal legal authority across the UK to all the measures we have introduced. The police will have the power to use 'reasonable force' to make sure people do what they're told. By way of example, there are now 500 officers on the rail network to deter unnecessary travel. Parliament has also shut early for Easter recess to give time for all the necessary safety works to be put in place so it can keep doing its proper job while minimising infection for staff and members.

Boris called Michael Gove and me in to talk ventilators. He wants Michael to pick it up, given all the procurement people are actually based in the Cabinet Office. In meetings, Michael likes to ask what he calls his 'daft laddie' questions – the really basic ones that nobody else dares articulate for fear of sounding stupid. Adopting his most innocent expression, Michael eyeballs officials and asks questions like 'Where are most ventilators made?' and 'Have we asked car manufacturers to help?' It's a slight guilty pleasure seeing how it rattles them.

Our competition is proving a mixed blessing. Some participants are a little over-enthusiastic. James Dyson, the vacuum manufacturer, has been contacting numerous people in high places to ensure he has a prominent role. He's continually on the phone, including to Boris, pushing to take part. He's an amazing innovator and engineer and he's completely right to turn to this – after all, we put out the call – but it's becoming awkward. Plus, existing ventilator manufacturers are extremely sniffy about anyone else muscling in, stressing that these machines are hugely sensitive and can kill people if the calibrations are wrong. My view is that the competitive tension is a good thing. Michael texted asking to talk urgently about what to do about Dyson. It's a fine line between enthusiasm and getting in the way.

I've been running on adrenaline for weeks now and generally doing fine, but for the first time today I was really flagging. I just felt exhausted. Nadine, who has made a good recovery, was leaving our weekly ministers' team meeting when she heard me cough. She told me I should get a Covid test. My private office was brilliant and immediately made the arrangements. Just a few hours later, the Queen's

nurse, no less, came to test me in my office. She wore heavy-duty PPE and pushed a swab down my throat. I braced myself like I was at the dentist and tried to feel grateful that I was able to have a test when we still don't have nearly enough to go round.

Today Boris declared that we'll go from 5,000 to 10,000 tests per day. Then, plucking figures out of nowhere, he declared that we'll go from 25,000 'hopefully very soon up to 250,000 per day'. Sharp intake of breath on my part. I like the ambition and his optimism, but even by my 'glass half full' mindset, I'm the one who has to deliver these promises.

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I was still feeling a bit rosey when I woke up this morning so decided to stay at home. Added to this groggy feeling is the gut-wrenching uncertainty about whether we can stop the spread. We are shooting up the curve with alarming speed – cases are doubling every seventy-two hours – but there are no more levers to pull. Normal life has ground to a more dramatic halt than we expected or even planned for. If we've got R below 1 then the rise in numbers might just stop before the NHS is overwhelmed. If all this still leaves R above 1 then there's nothing more we can do and we're still in exponential territory.

Initial findings from the Office for National Statistics (ONS) show a huge reduction in people's social contacts. Numbers on public transport have plummeted, and very few people are going to parks. Anonymised data from mobile phone companies showing people's movements strongly suggests that the over-65s are staying in one place. This is really encouraging on so many levels and shows what modern analytical technology can do when a crisis requires crashing through the usual bureaucratic hurdles.

Meanwhile SAGE has reported that significantly more men are being admitted to hospital – and dying – than women. Nobody knows why. Spare bed capacity in London is down to about 20 per cent and we're still only at the start. The Nightingale can't come quickly enough.

The modelling is being updated increasingly rapidly to reflect what we're actually experiencing. The peak is now expected in April. A